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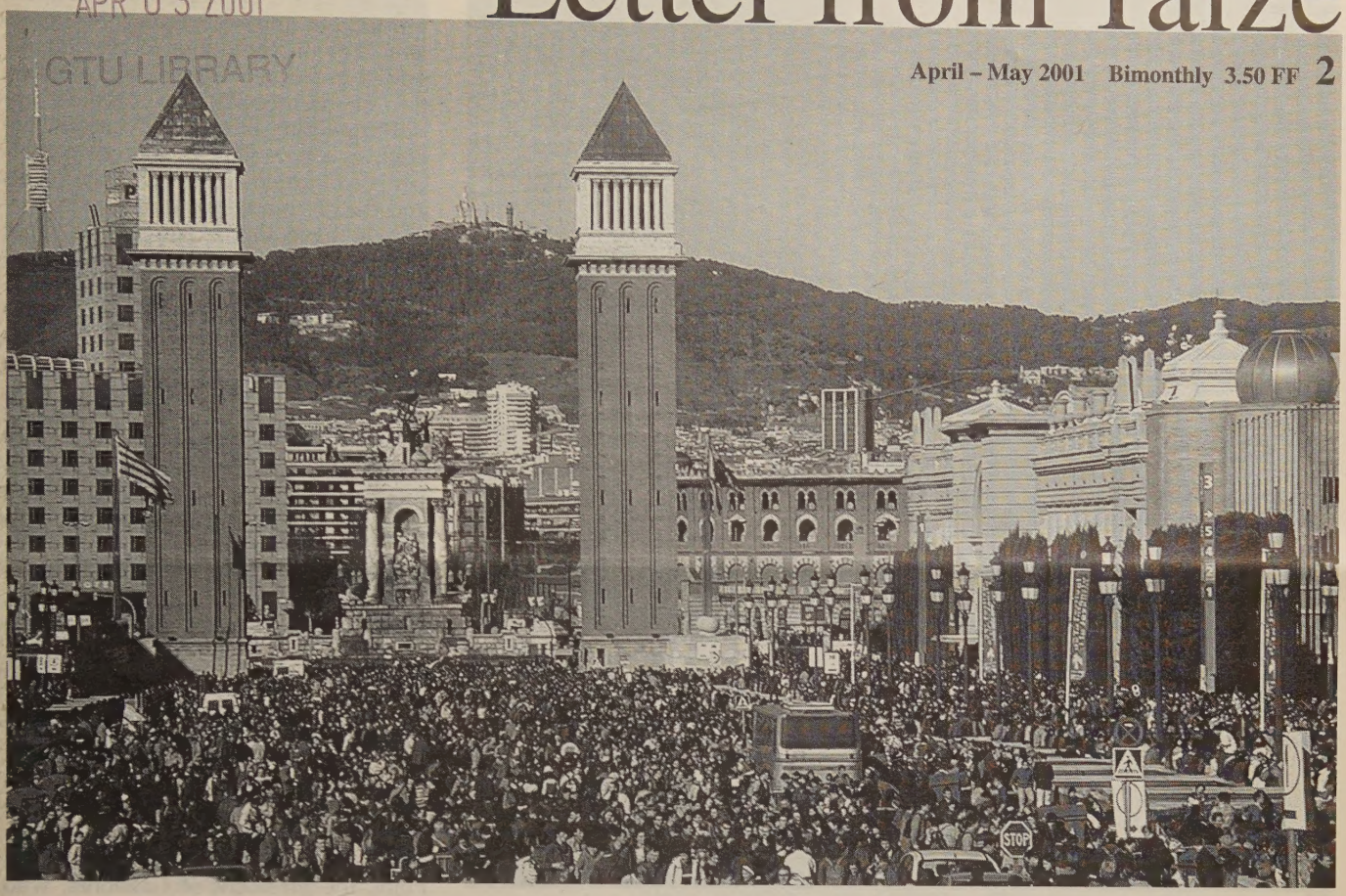
Letter from Taizé

April – May 2001 Bimonthly 3.50 FF 2



IN BARCELONA: A PILGRIMAGE OF TRUST ON EARTH

Sharing a Hope

From 28 December 2000 to 1 January 2001, tens of thousands of young adults from throughout Europe as well as from other continents came to stay with the parishes and families that were waiting for them in Barcelona and the surrounding area.

Traffic signs directed the coaches to pass by the hill of Montjuic, through a park of palm trees and cacti that overlooks the sea and offers a magnificent panorama of the city. "What a beautiful city! Such light! And what warmth!" You could hear these words in the coaches, especially in those which were arriving from the North of Europe.

A Long Preparation

Young people from many different countries, as well as those from the city and the region, had spent several months preparing for the meeting. But for all of them, it was a real discovery to realize how close they were! The joy that characterized the entire meeting was not only due to the Mediterranean temperament of the Catalans, but to a long inner preparation as well.

"When our guests were thanking us," writes Miguel, from the parish of Saint John the Baptist, in a suburb close to Barcelona, "I felt that I should be thanking them. What a marvelous opportunity for my friends and me to welcome people who came to our parish from France, from Hungary, from Ukraine and from Poland! The meeting was full of the joy of all the participants; it brought new vitality to the parish. Now a group of young people has begun to lead a regular prayer and to share our hope by taking a more active part in parish life."

"What do we have to do? How will we find enough places? How will we communicate with one another? Who will lead the singing? What can we share? There are so few of us!" These questions often came up during the preparation meetings in Barcelona; it was as if those who had agreed to offer hospitality were at a loss. Some of them has already taken part in other European meetings, or even welcomed participants fifteen years ago during the previous meeting in Barcelona. And yet, it was as if they still had to climb over walls and to regain self-confidence, in order to be able to offer a warm and attentive welcome.

A few days before Christmas, it was still hard to imagine that over half of

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those coming would stay with families. People came to offer their homes right up to the very day the participants arrived.

The whole city was involved in the welcome. Even the internal television station in the underground showed images of previous European meetings and invited people to open their homes with these simple words: "You too can welcome."

Approximately 250 parishes offered hospitality to between 100 and 400 young people each. "For me it was the feast of Pentecost," writes a young mother. "We needed a breath of fresh air, and it was shown first of all by the astonishing fact that we were able to communicate despite the lack of a common language. Just as those who came to us were not afraid to set out on pilgrimage, in our turn we were able to go beyond our fear of strangers, of the unknown. Their experiences were a stimulus for us. It was important in particular for our children to see that it is possible to live together in great simplicity. In our parish, too, we got to know one another better, to count on each other and now, just like after Pentecost, we are looking forward to communicating what we have received. This visit of young pilgrims awakened in us a spirit of joy and festival, and we have understood better that prayer is the source of this."

Prayers and Workshops for Reflection

In the parishes, groups were formed every morning after the prayer together to hear people speak about their life or make visits to places in which signs of hope are lived out. The months of preparation were a time for discovering that thousands of people in Barcelona, in every neighborhood of the city, are active in projects of solidarity, mutual aid and welcoming the homeless. "For the life of our local Church," said a pastoral worker, "the preparation of the meeting was a unique opportunity for us to discover one another in a new way, to forget what often is so burdensome, the antagonisms and the discouragement. It was important to have this experience of great generosity and of the joy of communion. People of all generations were together for once, as well as those who go to church and those who do not go so often. Don't wait another fifteen years before coming back!"

At about noon, everyone met in the exhibition halls of the "Fira." Located right in the city, they surround a beautiful sunny space where everyone could eat outdoors. Four halls were large enough to hold all the participants for midday and evening prayer. To add to the beauty of the worship, ancient Catalan frescoes that decorate the Romanesque churches in the region were reproduced and set up in the halls.

The presence of many residents of Barcelona at the times of prayer showed how deeply they were involved in the adventure of the meeting. The archbishop of Barcelona and other bishops came one evening, as well as Mr. Jordi Pujol, the president of Catalonia, who had previously written a message in which he said, "For the third time, Catalonia gives a warm welcome to you.... We feel like a family thanks to the spirit of reconciliation and contemplative prayer which seeks the worldwide Christian unity. The European meeting will undoubtedly give us a fresh breath of honest and sincere spirituality."

How can the twenty-five workshops of reflection and listening held in the afternoons be summed up? Some people listened to an Orthodox church choir from Serbia, while others reflected on social problems, for instance violence. Some went to a museum close to the Fira to discover the place of the Gospel in Catalan art, from the Middle Ages to Gaudi. Others listened to an introduction on the theme of God's call. One afternoon, a young convict was authorized by the prison to come and speak to a group. He read a text from one of his comrades in prison who said, "I found God in prison. Now I am happy, even if my life is not easy. I read Brother Roger's letter and these words especially struck me: 'God is spirit.... He lives within us always, in times of darkness as well as when everything is bathed in light.'" Other participants were happy to spend time in one of the halls which had been set up for silent prayer.

To Witness to the Happiness of Trusting

How can we share this happiness discovered together? Many people are asking this question now. The letter *A Prospect of Happiness?* opens a way forward: "Christ calls us, the poor of the Gospel, to live out the hope of a communion and of peace and to let it shine out around us."

The gathering was above all an experience of communion. And this was only possible because many made the gift of themselves, for example the thousands of contact persons in every country who agreed to take charge of a group or of a bus. And there were all those in Barcelona: people in charge of parishes, school principals and caretakers who gave up their holidays so that the schools could be used to welcome, city workers who did their best for everything to work well, among other things the arrival and departure of the coaches.

It is true that Barcelona is a city that likes to organize festivals, but it is also a city of faithfulness. For more than twenty years now, a prayer has been held every Sunday evening in a church in the centre of the city. In many parishes, there is a great desire to continue a regular time of prayer. There will certainly be many new initiatives, as in one parish that now wants to offer a time of religious instruction for adults: "The young people gave us an example of living faith. If we for our part do not know what is at the heart of our faith, how can we hope to transmit the essential to others?"

To conclude, why not remember, as one Catalan wrote, a phrase heard on New Year's Day in the underground? The subway trains and stations were packed with participants in the meeting wearing backpacks, who were on their way to find their coaches. A voice came over the loudspeakers: "Don't worry; they are waiting for you." "Some people saw in these words a deeper meaning than just reassuring those who were worried they would be late. Don't worry, you saw that a communion is possible, with others, with God. Don't worry, we are going on a journey together, and we are waiting for one another; we don't want anyone to be alone. We are waiting for you, because we need to be together to witness to the happiness of trusting."

IN BARCELONA: TAIZÉ TURNS SIXTY

The Story of the Beginnings

Everything began sixty years ago when, in 1940, at the age of 25, Brother Roger left Switzerland, the country of his birth, to live in France, where his mother came from. He had been laid up for years by tuberculosis. During that long illness, he had matured in himself the call to create a community where simplicity and kind-heartedness would be lived out day after day.

When the Second World War began, Brother Roger was convinced that he should go immediately to help people who were in difficulty, as his grandmother had done during World War I. The tiny village of Taizé, where he settled, was close to the demarcation-line that divided France in two; it was well situated for welcoming refugees who were fleeing the war. Friends from Lyon began to give the address of Taizé to people who needed a place to hide.

Thanks to a modest loan, Brother Roger was able to purchase a house and its surrounding buildings in Taizé. He asked one of his sisters, Genevieve, to come and help him offer hospitality. Among the refugees they welcomed were Jews. Living conditions were rudimentary. There was no running water, so for drinking water they had to go to the village well. The food was simple, for instance porridge made of corn flour bought cheaply at the nearby mill.

In order not to put any pressure on those he was welcoming, Brother Roger prayed alone. He often went into the woods away from the house to sing. So that refugees who were Jewish or agnostic would not be embarrassed, Genevieve explained to each one that it would be better for those who wished to pray to do so alone in their rooms.

Brother Roger's parents, knowing that their son and daughter were exposed to danger, asked a family friend, a retired French military officer, to look after them; he did this conscientiously. In 1942, he warned them that they had been found out, and that everyone should leave at once. Brother Roger was able to return to Taizé slightly less than two years later. At that time he was not alone; his first brothers had joined him in the meantime and with them he had begun a common life that continued in Taizé.

A Conversation with Paul Ricoeur

For many years now, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur has been coming to Taizé. The excerpts presented here are taken from a conversation that was held in Taizé during Holy Week 2000.

Irruptions of goodness

What do I come looking for in Taizé? I would say to experience in some way what I believe most deeply, namely that what is generally called "religion" has to do with goodness. To some extent the traditions of Christianity have forgotten this. There has been a kind of narrowing, an exclusive focus on guilt and evil. Not that I underestimate that problem, which was a great concern of mine for several decades. But what I need to verify is that however radical evil may be, it is not as deep as goodness. And if religion, if religions have a meaning, it is to liberate that core of goodness in human beings, to go looking for it where it has been completely buried. Now here in Taizé I see, in a certain sense, irruptions of goodness, in the community life of the brothers, in their calm and discreet hospitality, and in the prayer. I see thousands of young people who do not express a conceptual articulation of good and evil, of God, of grace, of Jesus Christ, but who have a fundamental tropism towards goodness.

The language of the liturgy

We are overwhelmed by a flood of words, by polemics, by the assault of the virtual, which today create a kind of opaque zone. But goodness is deeper than the deepest evil. We have to liberate that certainty, give it a language. And the language given here in Taizé is not the language of philosophy, not even of theology, but the language of the liturgy. And for me, the liturgy is not simply action; it is a form of thought. There is a hidden, discreet theology in the liturgy that can be summed up in the idea that "the law of prayer is the law of faith."

From protesting to attesting

I would say that the question of sin has been displaced from the center by a question that is perhaps more serious—the question of meaning and meaninglessness, of the absurd. (...) We are heirs to a civilization that has in fact killed God, in other words that has caused absurdity and meaninglessness to prevail over meaning, and this gives rise to a deep protest. I use this word "protest," which is very close to "attest." I would say that now attesting follows from protesting, that nothingness, the absurd, death, are not the last word. That relates to my question of goodness because goodness is not only the response to evil, but it is also the response to meaninglessness. In protest there is the word *testis*, witness: you pro-test before you can at-test. At Taizé there is the road from protesting to attesting and this road passes by the law of prayer, the law of faith. Protest is still negative: you say no to no. And there you have to say yes to yes. There is thus a seesaw movement from protesting to attesting. And I think that it comes about through prayer. I was very touched this morning by the singing, those prayers in the vocative: "O Christ." In other words here we are neither in the descriptive nor the prescriptive mode but in the exhortative and in acclamation! And I think that acclaiming goodness is really the most basic hymn.

"Who will teach us happiness?"

I like the word happiness a lot. For a long time I thought that it was either too easy or too difficult to talk about happiness, and then I got beyond my scruples, or rather I deepened those scruples with respect to the word happiness. I take it in all its various meanings, including that of the beatitudes. The formula of happiness, is "Happy the one who...." I greet happiness as a "re-cognition" in the three meanings of the word. I recognize it as mine; I approve of it in others, and I am grateful for the happiness I have known, the small experiences of happiness, which include the small experiences of memory, in order to heal me of the great unhappiness of forgetting. And there I function both as a philosopher, rooted in the Greeks, and as a reader of the Bible and the Gospel where you can follow the trajectory of the word happiness. It seems that there are two levels: the best of Greek philosophy is a reflection on happiness, the Greek word *eudaimon*, for example in Plato and Aristotle, and on the other hand I am very much at home with the Bible. I think of the beginning of Psalm 4: "Ah, who will teach us happiness?" It's a rhetorical question, but it finds its answer in the beatitudes. And the beatitudes are the horizon of happiness of an existence placed under the sign of kindheartedness, because happiness is not simply what I do not have and what I hope to have, but also what I have tasted.

Three figures of happiness

I was reflecting recently on the figures of happiness in life. With respect to the created universe, the beautiful landscape in front of me, happiness is admiration. Then, a second figure, with respect to others: recognizing others and, according to the nuptial model of the Song of Songs, it is jubilation. Then, a third figure of happiness, turned towards the future, is expectation: I still expect something from life. I hope to have courage to face the misfortune I am not aware of, but I still expect happiness. I use the word expectation, but I could use another word that comes from the First Epistle to the Corinthians, from the verse that introduces the famous chapter 13, on "love that understands everything, that excuses everything." The verse says: "Aspire to the greatest gift." "Aspire": that is the happiness of aspiring that completes the happiness of jubilation and the happiness of admiration. (...)

A joyful service

What strikes me here, in all the little daily services of the liturgy, in the meetings of all kinds, the dinners, the conversations, is the total absence of relationships of domination. At times I have the impression that, in the kind of patient and silent meticulousness that characterizes all the acts of the members of the community, everyone obeys without anybody giving orders. This creates an impression of joyful service, how can I put it, of loving obedience, yes, of lov-

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These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Mk 9:17-29
1 Tue Someone said to Jesus: I believe! Help my lack of faith.

Ps 138
2 Wed Lord, you look upon the humble. Though I live surrounded by trouble, you give me life.

Lk 1:39-56
3 Thu Mary said: The Lord's merciful love stretches from age to age upon those who revere him.

1 Th 5:12-22
4 Fri Be always joyful, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances.

1 P 3:8-12
5 Sat Do not repay one wrong with another. Seek peace and pursue it.

Jn 10:22-30
6 SUN Jesus said: My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

Ps 86
7 Mon Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth. Give me an undivided heart that I may revere you.

Mk 10:17-22
8 Tue Jesus said to a young person: You lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

2 Tm 2:1-7
9 Wed Paul writes: Draw your strength from the grace which is in Christ Jesus.

2 Th 1:11-12
10 Thu May God fulfill every good purpose of yours by his power and complete all that you have been doing by faith.

Mt 16:21-27
11 Fri Jesus said: Whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever risks their life for my sake will find it.

Ep 1:15-23
12 Sat May God enlighten the eyes of your heart so that you may see the hope to which he calls you.

Jn 13:31-35
13 SUN Jesus said: Love one another just as I have loved you. By this, everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

Is 50:10
14 Mon Who among you reveres the Lord? Who among you walks in darkness and sees no light? Trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon your God.

Jm 1:22-25
15 Tue James writes: Do not only listen to the Word, put it into practice.

Ne 8:8-12
16 Wed Do not be sad or afflicted: God's joy is your strength.

Ps 119:33-40
17 Thu Turn my heart towards your way, O God, and not to selfish gain. By your word give me life.

Mt 18:15-20
18 Fri Jesus said: When two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.

1 Jn 3:16-24
19 Sat We can reassure our hearts before God, whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.

Jn 14:22-26
20 SUN Jesus said: Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

Is 55:10-11
21 Mon The Lord says: As the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before they have watered the earth and made it fertile, so is it with the word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me before it has achieved its purpose.

Mt 7:24-27
22 Tue Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and puts them into practice is like someone who built their house on rock.

Ep 3:2-6
23 Wed Paul writes: The mystery of Christ is that all peoples now share the same inheritance, being members of one body, and having received the same promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel.

Lk 24:46-53
24 Thu ASCENSION
After Jesus' Ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem full of joy, and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

1 Jn 4:7-12
25 Fri God's love for us has been shown in this way: God sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him.

Ac 2:42-47
26 Sat All the believers held everything in common. They sold their goods and possessions and shared the proceeds according to the needs of each person.

Jn 17:11-21
27 SUN Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying: Father, may they all be one, just as you are in me and I am in you, so that they may also be in us and the world may believe that you sent me.

Mk 16:15-20
28 Mon After Jesus' Ascension, the disciples went out and proclaimed the Gospel everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word.

Jn 14:15-21
29 Tue Jesus said: I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor who will stay with you for ever — the Spirit of truth.

Is 11:1-9
30 Wed Isaiah said: On that day there shall be no more hurt or violence, for the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the bottom of the sea.

Zp 3:14-18a
31 Thu Your God is with you. God will quiet you with his love and dance with joy for you.

MAY

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JUNE

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Ps 72

1 Fri In God's days justice will flourish, and peace in plenty until the end of time. For the Lord rescues the needy who call to him and the poor who have no one to help.

Rm 13:8-10

2 Sat All the commandments can be summed up in this: Love your neighbour as yourself.

Jn 14:21-26

3 SUN PENTECOST Jesus said: The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

Rm 5:1-11

4 Mon Our hope will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

Mt 10:37-42

5 Tue Jesus said: If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, they will certainly not lose their reward.

Rm 8:26-27

6 Wed We do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Rm 8:14-17

7 Thu Paul writes: You did not receive a spirit which makes you a slave to fear again; you received the spirit of adoption by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Ep 2:14-18

8 Fri Christ came to announce the joyful message of peace: peace to those who are far away, peace to those who are near. Through him, in one Spirit, we all have free access to the Father.

Lk 11:9-13

9 Sat Jesus said: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

Jn 16:12-15

10 SUN Jesus said: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord but will say only what he has been told.

Mt 18:21-22

11 Mon Peter asked Jesus, "How many times should I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Ep 1:3-14

12 Tue God chose us in Christ, before the world was made, to be holy and faultless before him in love.

Jr 1:4-8

13 Wed God said to Jeremiah: Go to everyone I send you to. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you.

Jn 6:28-35

14 Thu Jesus said: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Ph 1:20-26

15 Fri Paul writes: Now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For me, to live is Christ.

Jn 15:1-5

16 Sat Jesus said: Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Lk 7:36-50

17 SUN Jesus said to a woman, "Your sins are forgiven." Those who were present began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Mt 9:9-13

18 Mon As he walked, Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me". And he got up and followed him.

Rm 6:12-14

19 Tue Give yourselves to God and then sin will no longer have any power over you — you are not under law, but under grace.

Dt 6:4-9

20 Wed Moses said to the people: The Lord our God is the only God. Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.

Jn 12:47-50

21 Thu Jesus said: I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.

Rm 5:1-11

22 Fri The proof that God loves us is this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been reconciled to God by Christ's death, how much more shall we be saved by his life!

Mt 12:14-21

23 Sat Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah: My servant will not quarrel or cry out, he will not snuff out the smouldering wick. All the nations will put their hope in him.

Ac 13:23-25

24 SUN St JOHN THE BAPTIST As John was completing his work, he said: Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but one is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

1 P 4:7-11

25 Mon Peter writes: Above all, love each other deeply, because love wipes away many a sin.

1 Jn 4:7-11

26 Tue This is love: not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins.

Na 1:7-8

27 Wed God is better than a fortress in time of trouble. He recognizes those who trust in him, even when the flood rushes on.

Rm 8:28-30

28 Thu In all things God works for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose.

Mt 16:13-20

29 Fri SS PETER AND PAUL Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by any human, but by my Father in heaven."

1 P 5:1-4

30 Sat Watch over those who are entrusted to you, not simply as a duty, but willingly and with gladness of heart, according to God's will.

JOHANNINE HOURS

May: 1 Peter 4,8

Every day it can happen that we make mistakes which are more or less serious. The New Testament does not hide the fact that, already at the time of the apostles, this question arose: If the Holy Spirit has been poured out, why is it that even those who try to follow Christ sometimes do wrong?

The apostle Peter does not reply to this question directly. But he shows a way forward when people's faults and mistakes lead us to become discouraged: "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of wrongs." He is inspired here by a Biblical proverb: "Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs" (Prov 10,12). How does love "cover" wrongs, or even sins? "To cover over wrongs" is demanding. It does not mean denying them or hiding them, but struggling to take away their harmfulness, to limit their power to destroy. Love "covers" a wrong like throwing a wet towel on a fire that is beginning to burn. It is important to act quickly. Otherwise it will become difficult to extinguish the blaze before it has consumed everything. Harsh or unthinking words, forgetfulness or negligence, failures and offenses are like sparks that can become destructive blazes. Love is able to "cover" them, to nip in the bud their formidable ability to harm.

"Covering wrongs" is the exact opposite of a passive attitude. It requires an energy that can sometimes be superhuman, the "deep love" of which Peter speaks, to neutralize wrongs which have been done. The Holy Spirit supports us in this, at time suggesting surprising ideas to make life beautiful in spite of disappointments.

- How do we react in the face of wrongs which are done? What can we do to limit or even take away their power to harm?
- What reawakens in me a "deep love" when I am disappointed because of the blunders of others or my own mistakes?

June: John 5,1-24

Jesus heals a sick man on the Sabbath day, a day when everyone is invited to look at the world with God's eyes. On the eve of the first Sabbath, God saw that all he had done was very good (Gen 1,31). Jesus also sees what is not yet good. He is attentive to the suffering of that crowd of sick people clustered around a pool, unable to enter the Temple nearby to take part in the celebrations there.

Jesus asks one of them, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man hesitates, not daring to hope. He never had any luck. No one has helped him. He can walk a bit, but so slowly that he always gets there late. Jesus says to him, "Get up, take your mat and walk." The sick man trusts those words. He gets up and goes to the Temple. There, a while later, Jesus speaks to him again, saying, "Sin no more." Before that, others had also warned the man not to sin because, by carrying his mat, he was not keeping the Sabbath commandment. But Jesus is speaking about sin in a deeper sense. The heart of sin is not to break a rule, for instance by working on the Sabbath day. "To sin" means literally "to miss the mark." In his discouragement, the sick man missed that for which human beings are made: to love life and to praise God. The thirty-eight years he spent lying there without doing anything echo the thirty-eight years during which Israel wandered in the wilderness far from the land of its happiness (Deut 2,14).

This healing is a "sign," the visible tip of an infinitely more immense reality. It manifests God's work. God is always active. Each day, at every moment, God gives life, saves life from absurdity, gives it a meaning. We do not see Christ, but we have his words in the Gospel. In hearing him tell us "Get up!" we "cross over from death to life."

- Why did the sick man not really dare to answer Jesus' question: "Do you want to be healed?" What made him prudent, or even hesitant?
- Do I dare tell Christ what I would like for my life? Does what would make me "get up" seem to be possible, or inaccessible?
- What do the words of Christ "Get up and walk!" mean for me today?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Sweden

After the Meeting in Uppsala

From 2 to 5 November 2000, a meeting brought together in the town of Uppsala, Sweden, young people not just from the Scandinavian countries but also from Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Russia. (*Letter from Taizé* December 2000—January 2001.)

Three months after this meeting, young people from Uppsala are still thinking about the experience and its significance for the future. One girl writes: "While participating in the preparations for the meeting, I kept thinking to myself, 'This is something unique. Working together can't be this joyful and easy under normal conditions.' Today, a couple of months after the meeting, I know that the meeting was very special, but also that it is possible to keep working in the same way. We won't fill the cathedral all the time, but we can gather for prayers wherever we live. We are keeping in touch by email, and have decided to carry on through meeting once a month for prayer with people from different churches. We belong to different traditions and groups, and our prayers don't compete with those. The prayers are something different, and apparently we need that."

"Trust and reconciliation characterized the preparations and realization of this meeting. The number of young people involved, volunteers in the preparation teams and contributions from professionals in institutions and organizations made the event possible. It showed the connection between faith and solidarity, that a new way of worship, as well as making a commitment to help others, is possible in our daily lives. In the participating churches, intense preparations went on for a long period of time, and many made new discoveries in their own parishes: they noticed the deep commitment of people that they had not been in touch with before. The preparations put the young people at the center of parish life. Uppsala Cathedral—the national sanctuary of Sweden—is often used for large church events, and it has an important symbolic value. During the meeting six times it was filled with young people for quiet, contemplative prayer services. Probably nothing like this has ever happened before. Through this, the meeting contributed to reaching far beyond the established Christian groups."

Brazil

"Days of Trust" in Campina Grande

The Spazzio is a huge hangar near the bus terminal in Campina Grande, in the State of Paraiba. It was there that, from 4 to 7 January 2001, participants were welcomed to the fifth "Days of Trust" prepared by the Taizé brothers who live in Brazil. Buses arrived from throughout the country, bringing some 1500 young people. Their presence encouraged many others from Campina Grande to take part in the gathering as well. The participants were taken to the nineteen parishes and sectors of the city where youth teams were waiting for them, to accompany them to the families with whom they would be staying.

The people who were arriving were not aware how anxious the welcome team was. The sound system promised by the city had not yet arrived! How can you hold a meeting of this size without loudspeakers? Finally, one hour before the start, the big truck arrived. And in less than an hour, the technicians had everything in place so that everyone could take part in the evening prayer.

The Preparation

A team of young volunteers and Taizé brothers had been active in the diocese from the month of March onwards, visiting all the parishes. During October and November, Sisters of Saint Andrew also took part in the preparation. In the final months, regular broadcasts on the local radio lent support to the preparation meetings. Manoel, who was part of the preparation team, writes, "What I experienced during this year of preparation for the Days of Trust has been very important for me, both spiritually and humanly speaking. Now I can start to believe in my own capacities. I want to find a job that will permit me to be in touch with the people and the experiences I encountered during the preparation. For they have helped me to mature and to know myself and others better."

The Prayer

The Days of Trust found their rhythm in the regular times of prayer together. In the mornings, worship was held in the parishes, following many different styles. At the beginning of the afternoon and in the evening, the prayer took place in the Spazzio, with the meditative Taizé songs and periods of silence.

Before the evening prayer, during the free time before the evening meal, sometimes the music played by the youth groups was so loud that it seemed as if the building was trembling! But just before the prayer, the volume dropped and there were the same young people in prayer, in deepest silence. The meditative singing filled hearts with joy and peace. "I liked the prayers very much. We are not used to this kind of prayer. The songs penetrate the mind and the heart, and they make us light and at peace," wrote Fatima, from Campina Grande.

The part of the hall used for the prayers was decorated with fabrics that went from the raised platform all the way to the ceiling. In front of these fabrics there were icons, in the spirit of the Orthodox churches. The icons were hung above the platform, which was already fairly high. The icons were illuminated, while the assembly was in semi-darkness, so they were like windows open on the invisible realities of God.

The Programme

In the mornings, the young people met in the nineteen sectors of the town where they were staying. After the 8am prayer, they made visits to places such as prisons, hospitals and care units. Often during these visits, the unexpected occurred, that mysterious blessing that can accompany every sincere human encounter. "I have no words to describe how good and useful it was to take part in the Days of Trust," wrote a young man from Campina Grande. "The Days helped us see how important we are for one another, how we can help others by a few words or a visit. They woke us up from the passive comfort to which we are accustomed. Often, almost always, we love God only in words and not in acts, and that must change, because we have to love him in words, in acts and with all our being."

In the afternoons in the Spazzio, after prayer, a broad variety of people spoke about their lives and work. The local prison had allowed a young long-term prisoner to come. He spoke about his situation in prison, while singing songs he had composed himself. A group of handicapped people, including some in wheelchairs, performed a dance spectacle, including a real tango. Young Adenise, who is blind, said, "God gives us the means to compensate deficiencies in one field through activities in another field. Do not let yourselves be discouraged by the difficulties of life. Through trust in God, we can go ahead with our heads held high."

Later in the afternoons, the young people chose one of the following discussion topics: Does life have a meaning? Discovering the unity of the Church. How can we be fraternal in a world that is violent? Prayer and spiritual life.

The Days ended Sunday morning with a time of prayer, after the participants had taken part in the Eucharist in the parishes where they were staying.

> 4

A Conversation with Paul Ricoeur

ing obedience, which is the complete opposite of submission and the complete opposite of an aimless meandering. This fairly narrow path between what I have just referred to as submission and meandering is broadly marked out by the life of the community. And we, the participants (not those who attend, but those who participate), as I feel myself to have been and to be here, benefit from it. We benefit from this loving obedience that we in our turn exercise with respect to the example that is given. The community does not impose a kind of intimidating model, but a kind of friendly exhortation. I like the word exhortation because here we are not in the order of commandments, still less of constraint, but neither are we in the order of mistrust and hesitation, which is the case today in professional life, in urban life, both in the workday world and in leisure time. It is this shared peacefulness that represents for me the happiness of life with the Taizé Community.

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